

Disraeli had thought of returning through Italy, that he might see Naples and Rome, but he now abandoned the project, and took what was then the direct route by Gibraltar; though owing to a long detention in quarantine at Malta it was late in October before he reached England. At Bradenham he found a sorrowing household, and the beloved sister on whom the blow had directly fallen almost crushed by its force. 'I cannot trust myself to write of her,' he says in a letter to Meredith's sister on his arrival, 'but her sweet and virtuous soul struggles under this overwhelming affliction.' Sarah Disraeli was a woman, as her letters show her and as she is described by her friends, of intensely loving and sympathetic nature, of real nobility of character, and of no small intellectual capacity. Henceforth her life was dedicated to others; above all to her father and her family, for whom the desolation that had come upon her seemed to have quickened her affection. For her eldest brother especially this affection now became a passion. From the first she had a romantic faith in his coming greatness, which never wavered even in the darkest hour, and her chief solace in her loneliness was to watch the progress of his fame. It is not given to a man in the stress and turmoil of an active life to pay back in kind the self-forgetting devotion of a lonely woman's heart; but Disraeli's affection for his sister remained of rare depth and tenderness. 'I believe,' wrote an intimate friend,¹ 'he never entirely got over his deep sense of suffering at the crushing disappointment of her early hopes, and, amid the many stirring incidents of his eventful life, the death-bed scene at Cairo was not seldom recalled. He rarely spoke either of his sister or of Meredith, but that was his habit where his feelings were deeply concerned. Once I remember his describing Meredith to me as a man of great intellectual powers who would certainly have distinguished himself if he had lived; and on the first occasion of his becoming i The late Sir Philip Eose.